DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 120 618 CG 010 447

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TITLE A Comparison of the Counseling Priorities of Counselors and Students at Four Community Colleges.
PUB DATE [73]
NOTE 17p.

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Check Lists; *Community Colleges; *Counselor Functions; Counselors; Junior Colleges; Junior College Students; Perception; *Role Perception; *Sex Differences; *Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

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TITLE

A COMPARISON OF THE COUNSELING PRIORITIES OF COUNSELORS AND STUDENTS AT FOUR COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT

This study was concerned with determining if significant differences existed between various groups of students and counselors connected with two urban and two suburban public community colleges in regard to their perceptions of appropriate counselor roles and functions. The test instruments used were The Counseling Appropriateness Check List and The Ranking of Counselor Functions. The results revealed that significant differences existed between all students and all counselors in their perceptions of counseling. The results further revealed that the expected differences between urban and suburban students were not significant at the .05 level of confidence. Male and female students did not exhibit great differences in their perceptions of counseling. Male and female counselors were also not in significant disagreement.

Many educators (Gideonse, 19[illegible], Shertzer and Stone, 1968; Tyler, 1961), in all levels of education, believe that more than a casual relationship exists between students' level of adjustment and how well they do academically. For too many years either a connection was not seen between these two variables or it was ignored. Publicly controlled community colleges were no exception in this kind of thinking. Counseling programs have grown considerably in the p[illegible] two decades and, presently, there are counseling centers in virtually all public community colleges.

Literature dealing with how counselors and counseling centers can best serve the needs of students is becoming abundant (Zarkowski, 1969; and DeVolders, 1969). Most of this literature is written by counselors and educators. Until recently, virtually all the literature dealing with counseling centers was written from a philosophical and theoretical frame of reference. Student opinion and feedback were essentially ignored. Today studies are beginning to investigate what students consider appropriate and what they stress in their expectations of counselors and counseling centers. Studies, such as the ones done by Thompson and Zimmerman (1969), Wilcove and Sharp (1971), and Hamann (1970), attempt to make generalizations about counselors and counseling centers based on the populations they used. Although these studies are valuable to the field, there is the acknowledgement of the need for more comprehensive data which take into account student

opinion on all aspects of counseling and counseling centers.

It is essential that more information from the students be gathered on the community college level to determine what kind of counseling services should be made available for each specific community college setting. Effective counseling programs seem to be essential if the institutions are to make good their claim of "providing educational opportunities to all people."

This study attempted to assess students' and counselors' priorities for counseling functions at four community colleges where the populations are reasonably homogeneous.

The four community colleges: Philadelphia, Montgomery County, Bucks County, and Camden County (City Campus) attest to this tendency; with more than 95% of the student body of each institution residing in the geographic division served by that institution.[1] The fact that virtually all the students attending their specific community colleges are members of essentially the same environment produces a greater degree of homogeneity than at a four year college. Students from urban and suburban environments might value, expect, and be satisfied with quite different counselor attitudes and functions (Eiben, 1970). Socio-economic class differences also may influence the counselors' reactions and attitudes (Garfield and others, 1971).

Essentially there were eight different groups and they were compared in four different areas of concern. The groups

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[1]Contact with the registrars at all four institutions involved.

were: All Students, All Counselors, Male Students, Male Counselors, Female Students, Female Counselors, Urban Students and Suburban Students. The areas of concern were: the ways different groups ranked various counselor functions, how the different groups viewed the appropriateness of discussing problems of college routine, vocational choice, and adjustment to self and others with a counselor. The hypotheses compared one of the eight groups with another in the four areas of counseling.

PURPOSE AND SIGNIFICANCE

The study attempted to analyze, evaluate, and compare the attitudes and expectations of students and counselors in regard to the operation of a counseling center and counselor functions in publicly controlled suburban and urban community colleges.

The study and the questionnaire that accompanied it attempted to determine, through primary involvements, students' perceptions of counselor functions in two diverse community college types of settings.

It also sought to determine the significant differences in perceptions of counselor functions between counselors and their respective student bodies.

It is believed that, based on this research, guidelines may be created to shape counselor priorities and goals and possibly establish new philosophies for the counseling centers at the four institutions involved in this study.

The data derived from this study should be of interest to many community colleges that have similar populations. The guidelines that the four community colleges will be able to develop based on the results of the questionnaire will possibly be applicable to many schools.

If the community college is to meet the task of providing a valid educational experience for the members of the community, the counseling program will have to respond to the needs of the students. The students will have to be made fully aware of all the possibilities and facilities available to them from the counseling center so that they can use it to its fullest potential. Most students' perceptions of counseling are based on their high school counseling experiences which are often quite different and limited in scope from the type available to them at the college level (Trent, J. W. and Medsker, L. L. 1968). It is the responsibility of the college counseling centers to work with the student body, the faculty, and the administration to widen their perceptions of counseling in a college setting.

SUBJECTS

The subjects, students and counselors, taking part in this study were derived from the four public community colleges mentioned previously. The students were all members of Introduction to Psychology classes at the two urban and the two suburban schools. The counselors were all full or part-

time members of the college counseling staffs. There were 216 students who completed questionnaires that could be used in this study. Philadelphia and Camden County College were regarded as urban institutions, while Bucks and Montgomery were considered the suburban institutions. There was a total of 107 urban students and 109 suburban students. There were 88 males and 108 females.

There were 36 counselors responding to the questionnaire. Of these, 18 were from urban schools and 18 were from suburban schools. There were 22 male counselors and 14 female counselors.

INSTRUMENTS

The Counseling Appropriateness Check List, developed by Roy Warman of Iowa State University's Counseling Center, is the questionnaire that was used to gather the majority of the data collected in this study. This questionnaire was developed in 1957 and has been used rather extensively since then. It was designed to specifically measure what five different groups of subjects felt were appropriate topics for discussion with counselors. There are three general types of functions that are being rated for appropriateness or non-appropriateness. They are: problems of college routine, problems of vocational choice, and problems of adjustment to self and others.

In addition to this, a list of ten counselor functions was presented to the subjects for ranking. This was The

Ranking of Counselor Functions. The counselor functions to be ranked included academic advising, educational and vocational goal planning, personal counseling, transfer counseling, making referrals, running groups, and other functions associated with a counselor in a college setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In order to facilitate a discussion of the results, the various groups will be referred to in the following manner:

Urban Students----------Group A
Suburban Students----------Group B
All Students----------Group C
All Counselors----------Group D
Urban Counselors----------Group D_1
Suburban Counselors----------Group D_2

Table One represents the results in comparing proportions of one group to another in the way the groups ranked the counselor functions and how the groups felt about the appropriateness of discussing problems of college routine, vocational choice, or adjustment to self and others with a counselor. The scores are presented in correlation coefficients for the ranking comparisons. For the appropriateness comparisons, Z scores are shown.

TABLE ONE

Groups Being Compared	Area in Question	Statistical Results
*1. D and C	Ranking of Functions	R rho = .297
2. A and D_1	"	R rho = .915
*3. B and D_2	"	R rho = .272
4. Male and Female Students	"	R rho = .906
5. Male and Female Counselors	"	R rho = .854
6. A and B	"	R rho = .915
7. A and B	College Routine	Z = -.785
8. C and D	"	Z = -.738
9. Male and Female Students	"	Z = .638
10. A and B	Vocational Choice	Z = .001
11. C and D	"	Z = -1.37
12. Male and Female Students	"	Z = -.577
13. A and B	Adjustment Problems	Z = -.896
*14. C and D	"	Z = -5.36
15. Male and Female Students	"	Z = -1.06

* - There was significant difference between these two groups at the .05 level of confidence.

It came as no great surprise that students and counselors, on the whole, ranked counselor functions differently and that they had different perceptions of what is and is not appropriate for discussion with a counselor in a community college setting. Studies, as far back as 1960 (Warman, 1960) and even earlier than that, have come to this same conclusion. This trend of difference between the two groups continues in community colleges and at all levels of education today (DeVolder, 1969; Eiben, 1970; and Farber, 1972). Many authors have pointed out that much of this discrepancy lies in two areas. The first is the counselor's unwillingness or inability to find out what students want. Many feel that this is caused by the counselor's desire to be primarily involved in dealing with the personal problems of the students (Collins, 1965). The second concern, which is getting more and more attention in the literature, is the student's perception of counseling, what this perception is based on, and their willingness to seek help (Gelso & McKenzie, 1973; Karl and O'Connell, 1972; and Wilcove and Sharp, 1971).

Since this study deals with community college students and the vast majority are, at most, two years removed from high school educationally, many of their perceptions of counselors are traceable to the roles and functions of their high school counselors. This, in many cases, is quite different from the roles college or community college counselors would like to be seen by students, faculty, and administration (Jones, 1970).

The results of this study, in its comparison of all students and counselors, are clear. There seems to be very little disagreement about discussing problems of vocational choice or college routine with a counselor. More than 94% of the students feel it is appropriate to discuss vocational problems and more than 92% regard discussing problems of college routine as appropriate also. The counselors agree with the students in these two respective areas 99% and 96%.

The study further hypothesized that there would be significant differences between counselors and students in whether or not to discuss problems of college routine. This hypothesis was rejected. The hypothesis dealing with vocational choice in regard to these two groups was supported in that there was no significant difference.

The area that the two groups do not agree upon is the area of adjustment to self and others. While 98% of the counselors feel this area is appropriate for discussion, only 50% of the students feel the same way.

The study hypothesized that there would be no significant differences between urban and suburban students in the ranking of counselor functions, and in how these two groups viewed the appropriateness of discussing college routine and vocational choice problems with a counselor. These hypotheses were supported. The study rejected the hypothesis that the urban and suburban students would differ in their views of discussing personal problems with a counselor.

In the ranking of the functions there is a very high correlation (ρ rho = .915) between urban and suburban students.

The only function which shows more than one place differentiation in the ranking is the function of providing information concerning transfer. Urban students placed this function as seventh and suburban students placed it fourth. This is quite understandable in view of the information that a larger percentage of suburban students are in transfer programs to four year colleges and universities than urban students are at the four community colleges in question in this survey.

In comparing all male and all female students, regardless of urban or suburban setting, there was nothing statistically significant.

When comparing the two groups in adjustment to self and others, there is similarity to the situation of urban and suburban students. The difference is not significant; only 46% of males felt this area was appropriate for discussion to 53% of the females.

The comparison of counselors on a sex basis and on an urban and suburban setting basis shows that they think quite alike. There are no striking differences, only very slight ones.

SUMMARY

Ten out of the fifteen hypotheses in this study were supported by the research and five were rejected at the .05 level of significance.

The hypotheses most clearly supported dealt with the differences in perceptions between all counselors and all

students in both the ranking correlation (ρ rho = .297) and on the Appropriateness Check List regarding problems of adjustment ($Z = -5.36$).

The implication of these results is that there is a need for greater dialogue between students and counselors and that a program, designed to acquaint students with the many facets of a college counseling center, be included in the basic freshman orientation programs, This dialogue might also serve to make counselors more aware of some of the immediate counseling needs and concerns of the incoming class. By familiarizing themselves with each new student population, counselors may also be able to project what some future problems might be. Then they could possibly work towards averting these problem situations.

Since the students are in agreement with the counselors in two of the three areas, it is possible to infer that the gap in the area of discussing problems of adjustment to self and others is not that great between the two groups. Very often problems of college routine are really problems of personal adjustment to school and the social setting. Students coming to see a counselor about concerns dealing with college routine are, at the same time, coming for personal counseling.

Finally, there eas no area that counselors felt was inappropriate for discussion and students should be made aware of this fact. With this information students may become more comfortable and more willing to discuss prob-

lems in all areas. The doors must be opened wide and students must be able to believe that this freedom truly exists.

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